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## A Comparison of the Theories of Aristotle and of St. Thomas Aquinas, as Regards the Existence of God

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A COMPARISON OF THE THEORIES OF ARISTOTLE AND OF

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, AS REGARDS THE EXIS-  
TENCE OF GOD.

By

Edward M. Danaher

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College

of Liberal Arts, Marquette Univer-

sity, in Partial Fulfill-

ment of the Require-

ments for the De-

gree of Bachelor

of Philosophy.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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The object of this thesis is to show, by means of the comparisons of the arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas and of Aristotle, as regards the existence of God, what manner of God exists. This I shall endeavor to do by stating the arguments of Aristotle and of St. Thomas Aquinas, and by presenting commentaries upon these theories. To substantiate their points, I shall give views regarding their theories, as expressed by other philosophers throughout the various ages.

I desire especially to gratefully acknowledge Father E.A. Mc Grath, my major professor and adviser, and also Dr. Anton C. Pegis of Fordham University, for their kindly interest and helpfulness in the preparation of this thesis.

Edward M. Danaher  
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## OUTLINE

Problem: A comparison of the theories of Aristotle and of St. Thomas Aquinas, as regards the existence of God.

- I. A). Life of Aristotle.  
B). His works.  
C). Influencing factors upon his philosophy.
- II. A statement of the theory of Aristotle and an explanation of this theory.
- III. A commentary upon the theory of Aristotle.
- IV. A). Life of St. Thomas Aquinas.  
B). His works.  
C). Influencing factors upon his philosophy.
- V. A statement of the theories of St. Thomas Aquinas and explanations of these theories.
- VI. A commentary upon the theories of St. Thomas Aquinas.
- VII. A direct comparison of the theories of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas from the following view-points:
  - A). Does a God exist?
  - B). What manner of God is He, i.e.; what attributes, if any, does He possess?
  - C). In what manner does Christianity show us, more clearly than paganism, this God?



Aristotle, the most renowned of Greek philosophers, was born at Stagira, Macedonia in 384 B.C., and was for twenty years a student of philosophy in the school of Plato at Athens, but at the same time a teacher. After Plato's death, he opened a school of philosophy at the court of Hermias, King of Atarneus, in Mysia, whose adopted daughter he afterward married. At the invitation of Philip of Macedon, he undertook the education of his son, Alexander. When Alexander succeeded to the throne, the philosopher returned to Athens and opened a school in the Lyceum. From being held in the covered walk (peripatos) of the Lyceum, the school obtained the name of the Peripatetic. The number of his separate treatises is given by Diogenes Laertius as 146; only 46 separate works bearing the name of the philosopher have come down to our time. He died at Chalcis, Euboea, in the year 322 B.C.

Aristotelianism, or Peripateticism, the doctrine of philosophy of Aristotle. Aristotle attempted to steer a medium course between the ultraidealism of his master Plato, and the low sensationalism of the physical school of Elea. His genius was as wide as nature. He keenly combated the ideal theory of Plato, or that which expounded the deity as holding in himself the archetypal ideas after which the world was fashioned, and which it was the business of reason and science to discover. But while denying these ideas of his master, he nevertheless agreed with him in the view that knowledge contains an element radically distinct from sensation. He also

and ethics, or into...

Speculative philosophy contemplates the real order of things,

differed from the Eleatics and the Epicureans, inasmuch as he denied that sensation could account for the whole of knowledge; but maintained, with them, that without this sensation, knowledge would be impossible. The celebrated maxim that "there is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the senses," if not Aristotle's, at least well expresses a side of his doctrine; but, when he insists upon the distinction between the necessary and the contingent, the absolute and the relative, he rises altogether above the sphere of sensation, and takes emphatically his place with reason. Philosophy, according to Aristotle, is properly science arising from the love of knowledge. There are two sorts of knowledge; mediate, and immediate. From immediate knowledge, which we gain through the experience of particulars, we derive mediate knowledge, by means of argumentation, whose theory it is the office of logic to properly expound. Logic is, therefore, the instrument of all science; but only quoad formam, for it is experience which supplies the matter to be worked upon. The formal part of reasoning he accordingly expounds better than any man either before or since his time. He, indeed, created logic, and this system stands erect through the changes of the centuries. He most profoundly bases his logic upon the laws of contradiction, and he even recognized as of sufficient reason as a regulative principle in the evolution of truth. After logic, he took up all the science, rational, empirical, and mixed, except one alone, viz., history.

He seems to have divided philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics, or into speculative and practical knowledge. (1)

Speculative philosophy contemplates the real order of things, irrespective of human control; practical philosophy discusses affairs voluntary and accidental. Real substances are either invariable, or variable; while sublunary matters are variable; while the deity alone is impershable, and unchangeable. Do men pursue the real in an abstract way? Then, metaphysics and mathematics emerge. Do they pursue Knowledge as to its objects? Then physics, cosmology, psychology, theology emerge. (2) Practical philosophy again comprehends ethics, politics, and economy. A word or two on each of these heads; and first of speculative philosophy.

1. Physics, or natural philosophy. Nature is the sum of all existences, which are disclosed to us by our perceptive faculties. The knowledge of nature is properly the knowledge of the laws of bodies in motion. Nature, cause, accident, end, change, infinitude, space, time, and motion, are included in this science. In his "Cosmology," Aristotle discusses astronomy, using that term in its widest signification. It appears to us moderns obscure and inconsistent, and is by no means satisfactory. Physiology is indebted to Aristotle for its first essay. The soul is, according to him, the active principle of organized life. It is distinct from the body, yet, considered as its form or entelechy, it is inseparable from it. Its faculties are production, nutrition, sensation, thought, and will or impulse.

2. The ruling idea of his practical philosophy was that of a sovereign good, and final end or aim of action. This



final end he denominated happiness, which is the result of the perfect energies of the soul, and is the highest of which our nature is capable. It arises from the perfect exercise of reason, and is ordinarily called virtue. This he describes as the mean between two extremes, which is the character of nearly the whole of his philosophy. He distinguishes the moral virtues into seven cardinal ones, of which justice, in a sense, embraces all the rest. Under the head of right, he distinguishes that belonging to a family from that belonging to a city. A perfect unity of plan prevails throughout his morals, politics, and economics. Both of the latter have for their object to show how this perfect virtue, already described, may be attained in the civil and domestic relationships, through a good constitution of the state and the household. The principle of the science of politics is expediency, and its perfection consists of suitableness of means to the end proposed. By this principle Aristotle proves the legality of slavery; and all education he refers to the ultimate end of political society. <sup>1</sup>

1. Collier's New Encyclopedia Vol.I

like an animal borne along by the action of its feet. For, in this first case, the whole would be moved by itself, and would be moved by its part, and one part by the other. This motion which moves must itself also be divisible, have parts, for every thing that moves is divisible, as is proved in the sixth book of the Physics. This section, the philosopher teaches that,

Everything which is moved is moved by a (1)

1. W.D. Ross, The Works of Aristotle, Vol. I, p. 107.



PROOFS OF ARISTOTLE

primary motion. Therefore, in addition to the primary motion, there is a secondary motion which involves the inaction of all. For, now, our senses show us that something moves, the sun, for instance. Therefore, it is moved by some other thing which moves it. Moreover, either that other motor is a motion, or it is motionless. If it be motionless, our assertion is proved, namely; that it is essential to establish a motionless moving; for that object, which is God. If, on the contrary, it be in motion, it is moved by some other motor. We must, therefore, either go on in this way forever, or come at last to the motionless motor. But it is impossible to go on thus forever. Accordingly, we must affirm the existence of a primary motionless motor. (But in this proof there are two propositions to be proved, namely: That every moving thing in motion is moved by a motor other than itself, and that we cannot admit of an infinite series of motors).

Aristotle proves the first proposition in three ways:

If a motor be self-moving, it must contain in itself the primary cause of its motion; otherwise it is plain that it is moved by some other motor. It must also be moved by a primary movement; that is to say, by itself, and not by one of its parts, like an animal borne along by the motion of its feet. For, in this first case, the whole would be unmoved by itself, but would be moved by its part, and one part by the other. This motor which moves must itself also be divisible, have parts; for every thing that moves is divisible, as is proved in the sixth book of the Physics. This settled, the philosopher reasons thus:

Everything which we suppose is self-moving is moved by a (1)

primary motion. Therefore, inaction of one of its parts involves the inaction of all. For, if the inaction of one part leaves the other part in motion, it ceases to be the whole itself which moves by a primary motion; it is that part alone, since it continues to move while the other part is at rest.

But nothing which stops as soon as another thing stops is self-moving; for that object whose cessation involves the cessation of the other, is also that whose motion involves the motion of the other; therefore that other is not self-moving. Accordingly, that which we supposed to be self-moving does not actually move at its own impulse. Accordingly, finally, all which is in motion is necessarily moved by some other motor other than itself.

We cannot destroy this reasoning by saying that what is supposed to be self-moving can have no part of it in repose; and again, that the part can neither stop nor move save by accident, as Avicenna so scandalously holds (ut Avicenna calumniatur). In reality, the whole force of this reasoning lies in the fact that if anything be self-moving by a primary movement, and of itself, not by reason of its parts, it follows that its motion no longer depends upon an outside motor. Now, the movement of the divisible, as well as its being, depends on the being and movement of its parts; hence it cannot move of itself by a primary motion. It is therefore not essential to the truth of the conditional proposition inferred here, that we should admit as absolutely true that the part moves in the inaction of the whole; it is enough that the sum-total of the conditional proposition is true, namely, that if the part be at rest, the whole will be at rest. And it may be true even if the antece-

gent proposition were impossible; as in this instance: If a man were an ass, he would be an irrational animal.

Aristotle again proves the same proposition as follows:

Everything that moves by accident doesn't move of itself, but is moved by the movement of some other thing; this is evident; neither that which moves naturally, by an inward motion, as the animal whose body is only moved by the soul; nor that which is moved by nature, by an outward motion, as heavy bodies; for everything of this kind moves only by the way of generation or else by the removal of an obstacle. Now, all that is moved either by accident or by itself. If by itself....etc.

The entire chain of reasoning may be summed as follows:

FIRST SYLLOGISM

MAJOR: Everything in motion is moved by a motor other than itself; in other words, nothing moves of itself.

MINOR: Now, our eyes show us the fact of motion.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, there is something else which moves that which we see in motion.

SECOND SYLLOGISM

MAJOR: There cannot be an infinite series of motors; in other words, there can only be a finite series of motors; in other words, there is one first motor.

MINOR: Now, this motor would not be the first if it were in motion, since it would then be moved by some other thing.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, there is one first motionless motor. We call this God.



First of all, however, we may here find place for the remark that Aristotle's theism, important as it may have been for the history of theology, has meant little or nothing for the religious life of mankind. It elevated the Deity to a height from which scarce a path leads down to the lowlands of humanity. Nowhere in this teaching about God is there any mention of a loving and compassionate father, of a rewarding and punishing judge, nor even a provident architect of the universe. In his desire to remove his God from even the remotest contact with human weakness, Aristotle condemns Him at the same time to complete sterility. That such a God does nothing and achieves nothing, is true in yet another sense, a sense which one might say is fatal to Him as a living reality.

If the question be asked, whether Aristotle thinks of God as creator of the world, the answer must certainly be that he does not. For him matter is ungenerated, eternal; he expressly argues against a creation of the world. This would not necessarily exclude the view that matter is throughout eternity maintained in existence by God, but there is no such of a trace of this in the doctrine of Aristotle. Also, there has been much controversy over the question whether God is for Aristotle only the final cause, or the efficient cause as well of change. There can be no doubt about the answer. What Aristotle does imply is that God's causation is not of either of the two types-- a physical force or a mental force. Aristotle's God is not merely an end existing in the future; He is eternal and thus differs from a merely imagined and anticipated ideal. The argument is also complicated by the fact that the object of know-



ledge also is described as moving without being moved. It is not however, meant that the object of knowledge as such causes movement in space. The doctrine is that all existing things may be arranged in two sets--a column of positives and a column of negatives. Of the the positives are the direct object of knowledge; the negatives are known as being only the opposites of the positives. Among the positives substances come first, and of substances the first is incomposite, fully actual substance, i.e., the kind of being that we have found to be implied as the first cause of movement. But this is not only the primary object of knowledge, the most intelligible of all things; it is also the most desirable. The knowledge of it inevitably produces desire for it, love of it. And by the desire it inspires it sets the world in motion. What the object knowledge as such 'moves' is simply the mind, and it moves not to physical action, but to thought.

The defects of Aristotle's theology flow, in the main, from its appearance in his system as a sort of appendix to physics, and to his particular physical theory. (1) The latter point may be taken first. Much of his argument for the existence of God rests on premises which have for us no more than antiquarian interest. The notion of the peculiar 'divinity' of the celestial bodies, of their exemption from all change except motion in space; the notion of the universe as a system of concentric spheres; the notion of the universe as a system of concentric spheres; the notion of the priority of circular motion, and of a peculiar analogy between it and the unchanging activity of thought; these and similar features of his thought diminish for us the value of the theology which presupposes them.

In particular, they lead him to think of God not as operative with equal directness in all change and being, but as directly operative only at the outermost confines of the universe and as affecting human affairs only through a long series of intermediaries. But (2) the deeper defects of his theology arise not from its being based on a particular physical theory, but from its being based on physics to the exclusion of other possible bases. The primary fact, according to Aristotle, which calls for a special sensual explanation is the fact of movement. He shares with many other thinkers the assumption that movement cannot simply be accepted as an ultimate feature in the nature of the universe, but must be either explained, or asserted to be an illusory appearance.

Here he was guarded... help of the Dominicans... France in the Dominicans... the instruction of the... another account, he owed... interference of the... years of age, he was... order to teach at... held. He was... on the ethics... was sent to... gained... tained their... der the... neighboring... the principles of these orders

## THE LIFE OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas, or Thomas of Aquino, the prince of scholastic theologians, was of the family of the Counts of Aquino, and was born about 1226, in the castle of Rocca Secca, near Aquino, a small town half-way between Rome and Naples. He received the rudiments of his education from the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino, and completed his studies at the University of Naples. Against the will of his family, he entered (1243) the order of Preaching Friars founded by St. Dominic. In order to frustrate the attempts of his mother to remove him from the convent, he was sent away from Naples, first to Rome and then to Paris; but his brothers took him by force from his conductors, and carried him to the paternal castle. Here he was guarded as a prisoner for two years, when, by the help of the Dominicans, he contrived to escape, and went through France to the Dominican Convent at Cologne, in order to enjoy the instruction of the famous Albertus Magnus. According to another account, he owed his release from confinement to the interference of the Emperor and the Pope. In 1248, being 22 years of age, he was appointed by the general chapter of his order to teach at Cologne, together with his old master, Albert. He now began to publish his first works, commentaries on the ethics and the philosophy of Aristotle. In 1252 he was sent to Paris. It was not, however, till 1257 that Aquinas and his friend St. Bonaventura, the Franciscan, obtained their degrees of doctor, as the University of Paris under the influence of William de St. Amour, was hostile to the mendicant friars. He vindicated the principles of these orders



in an important work; and, in a disputation in presence of the Pope, procured the condemnation of the books of his adversaries. He continued to lecture with great applause in Paris, till Urban IV., in 1261, called him to Italy to teach in Rome, Bologna, and Pisa. It was at this time he composed most of his great works.

Even during his life, Aquinas enjoyed the highest consideration in the Church. Both Urban IV. and his successor, Clement IV., who were much attached to Aquinas, pressed upon him the highest ecclesiastical dignities in vain. He treated Christian morals according to an arrangement of his own, and with a comprehensiveness that procured him the title of the "Father of Moral Philosophy." The definiteness, clearness, and completeness of his method of handling theology were such that his "Summa Theologiae," which may be said to be the first attempt at a complete theological system, remains to this day substantially the standard authority in the Roman Church. Another important work of Aquinas is his "Summa Contra Gentiles," which deals chiefly with the principles of natural religion. His commentaries on Scripture and devotional treatises also have a high reputation. His influence on the theological thought of succeeding ages was immense. At the Council of Trent, the "Summa" was honored with a place on the table by the side of the Bible. It was at Bologna that he began this his greatest work, by which his name will always be connected, but which he never lived to complete. While at work in Naples, his health broke down, but Gregory X., who has called a gen-



eral council to effect the union of the Greek and Latin Churches, summoned Aquinas to defend the papal cause at Lyons, where the council was to meet on May 1, 1274. He set out, though suffering from fever, and was surprised by death on the road at the Cistercian abbey of Fossa-Nuova, March 7, 1274. All Europe mourned his loss. Miracles were said to be wrought at his funeral. Universities, religious orders, and princes contended for the honor of possessing his body. It was finally bestowed by the Pope on Toulouse, where it was received by 150,000 persons, headed by Louis, Duke of Anjou. Aquinas was canonized by John XXII. in 1323, and proclaimed a "Doctor of the Church," by Pius V. in 1567. The first complete edition of Aquinas' works was published in 17 volumes folio, at Rome, in 1570. (1)

in 1. Collier's New Encyclopedia Vol. I

PROOFS OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

I reply that the existence of God may be proved in five ways.

Motion is the first and most manifest:

It is an assured fact, and we see, that there is motion in the world. Now, every object in motion is moved by some other. Nothing can be moved, if it be not in potentiality relatively to the movement imparted to it; and nothing could move save as being in act,---motion being only the passage from potentiality to act, save by that which is in act. Just as the fire, actually burning, makes the wood, which was burning in potentiality, actually burning, and thereby moves and changes it.

Now, it is impossible that one and the same thing should be at once actual and potential in one and the same respect, but only in different respects. That which is hot in act is not hot in potentiality. It is therefore impossible that one and the same

object, from one and the same point of view, can be at once moved and motor,--- that is to say, that it can move itself.

Therefore, all that is in motion is moved by some other thing.

Therefore this motor, if it be itself in motion is moved by some other thing, and that other thing, by still another. But

there must be a pause; we cannot go on thus to infinity, for there would be no prime motor; if there were no prime motor,

there would not be any motor, since secondary motors only move by the prime motor, as a stick is only moved by the hand. There

must therefore be a primary motor which no other moves. Every one understands that such a motor is God.

The second proof is that of the efficient cause.

We find in visible things a series of efficient causes, each of which produces the other; but we find nothing, and we can find nothing, which is its own efficient cause, since such a cause would be before being, which is impossible. Now, it is not possible to reascend endlessly from cause to cause, for in the sum total of the series of causes, the beginning is the cause of the middle, the middle of the end, what ever may be the number of terms. But if we remove the cause, we remove the effect. Therefore, if there were no first efficient cause there would be no middle or end to the series. But if there were an infinite series of efficient causes, there would be no first one, and therefore there would be neither a last effect, nor middle efficient causes, which is manifestly false. Therefore, there must be a first efficient cause, which all call God.

The third proof is that of the possible and the necessary.

We see being who may be or not be, since there are corruptions and generations. Now it cannot be that that which is such can endure forever, for that which may not be, it would follow that there was a time when nothing was. But in that case there would still be nothing now, for that which is not, does not begin to be, save through that which is already. If therefore, nothing was, nothing can ever have begun to be; therefore there would be nothing,---which is false. Therefore all beings are not merely possible, and there is a necessary being. Now, that which is necessary has in itself or outside of itself the cause of its necessity. But there can-



not be an endless series of necessary beings, external necessities, any more than there is an endless series of efficient causes. We must therefore establish the fact that there is something necessary itself, having no other cause for its necessity, but being the cause of all which is necessary. Now the being necessary in itself is God.

The fourth proof is that of the degrees of perfection.

We find more or less, and degrees of goodness, truth, nobility, and all other qualities of things. But the more and less can only be applied to various beings variously approaching a sovereign type, as, for example, Warmth is that which partakes more or less of absolute heat. There is therefore also a being who is supremely good, supremely true, supremely noble, and who thence is the Supreme Being. For, as Aristotle says, that which is supremely true is supremely. Now that which is supremely endowed with all perfection, of whatsoever kind it may be, is the cause of all degrees of perfection of the same kind, as fire is the cause of all heat. There is therefore, a being who is the cause of the being, of the goodness, of the perfection of all being, and that being is God.

Lastly, the fifth proof is drawn from the government of the world.

We see certain intelligent beings, such as bodies, tend to an end, since they do, usually or always, and in the same way, that which leads them to a desired goal. Therefore it is not accidentally, but rather in consequence of an intention, that they attain that end. But having no knowledge, they have



no individual intention, and advance to their end only as directed by an intelligence which possesses intention, as when the arrow is directed by the hunter. There is therefore an intelligent being who orders nature and guides it to its end. We call this God. (1)

1. Summa Theologica of Aquinas

...um est Dei), that ...  
...son, shone within ...  
...faculty, by the ...  
...Not that, in our ...  
...in this life, ...  
...by Saint Paul, ...  
...fact, our knowledge of ...  
...world in which we live ...  
...tures whose limitations ...  
...essence. On the ...  
...tures leads us to ...  
...in his hock on the ...

First, by ...  
...three being liable to ...  
...refer them to a perfect ...  
...teaches us that ...

Secondly, by ...  
...we refer all ...  
...beginning which they ...  
...lately transcended ...  
...is, but that he is ...

## ST. THOMAS'S COMMENT ON SAINT PAUL'S GREAT WORDS:

"THE INVISIBLE GOD IS SEEN IN HIS WORKS".

Knowledge of the true God of itself leads us to the God, but it is captive and bound by wilful love of injustice.

These men, therefore, possessed to a certain extent the true knowledge of God; for what we may know of God (quod notum est Dei), that is, what man may know of him through reason, shone within them, was showed unto them by some inner faculty, by the intrinsic light of the soul.

Not that, in one respect, God may not be unknown to man in this life, according to the mysterious inscription found by Saint Paul, -- Ignoto Deo. We don't know what God is. In fact, our knowledge of God begins with the spectacle of the world in which we live, with the sight of those sentient creatures whose limitations can in no wise represent the divine essence. On the other hand, however, the sight of his creatures leads us to know God in three ways, as Dionysius shows in his book on the Divine Names.

First, by causality (viam causalitatis). For all creatures being liable to change and imperfection we must needs refer them to a perfect and unchanging principle. And this teaches us that God is.

Secondly, by excellence (viam excellentiae). For when we refer all creatures to their beginning and cause, it is a beginning which they do not contain, and a cause which absolutely transcends them, and thence we know not only that God is, but that he is above all.

What is the nature of this knowledge? The Apostle tells us: we see these things by intellect (Intellectu conspicimus).

Thirdly, by negation (*viam negationis*). For this cause transcends all its effects; we must deny of it in a certain sense that which we see in created beings; and it is thus that we say of God that He is infinite and immutable, His creatures being finite and variable.

God, therefore, as Saint Paul says, made Himself manifest.

Now, God makes himself manifest in two ways: first, by shedding inward light upon our soul, and then by showing us the outward signs of His wisdom and power,---created beings. God thus made Himself manifest to all men, both by this inward light and by His creatures in whom we may read, as in a book, the knowledge of God.

But, more exactly, what do we learn of God from these postulates? The invisible perfections of God, says Saint Paul, that is, his essence (*per quae intelligitur Dei essentia*); but not in His unity. We find traces and images of Him in His creature, which show us partially and by their multiplicity that which is one in God, and through this our intelligence considers the essence of God under the forms of a goodness, as wisdom, a power, which are not such in God.

Secondly, we know His creative power,-- that His is the beginning of all things.

Thirdly, we know His divinity; we know that He is the end to which all things tend.

The first knowledge, that of the essence, is acquired by negation; the second, by causality; the third, by excellence.

What is the nature of this knowledge? The Apostle tells us: we see these things by intellect (*intellectu conspiciuntur*).



In fact, we know God by the intellect, not by the senses or imagination, which have not that power of transcendence which rises above material things; and God is a spirit.

\*\*\*\*\*

These two objections removed, Saint Thomas proceeds to This commentary on Saint Paul's words shows us clearly

the method of St. Thomas. Created beings are the starting-point; the active force is reason, the light which God sheds within the soul,-- the process to which he gives three names(causalitatis, excellentiae, or eminentiae, negationis), and which leads us to perceive that created beings, being subject to change and imperfection, do not exist of themselves; that is to say that God is, and that God, existing of Himself, is neither subject to change or imperfection, this process consists in perceiving perfection(excellentia) in imperfection, in deny- in (viam negationis) the limits of the finite qualities which we see. 1.

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Saint Thomas Aquinas, in the question of the existence of God and its proof, starts with a main idea from which he never deviates; it is that of Saint Paul: the invisible God is seen in His visible effects. We see that this is the principle of the proving of the infinite through the finite.

Henceforth, if any one object that the existence of God cannot be proved, because the proposition God is, is an identical and self-evident proposition, Saint Thomas confesses that it would be so to those who might know God in Himself, but not to us, who know Him only through His works.



If any one object that the existence of God is a truth superior to reason, and that faith alone can attain to it, he denies it, and declares that reason is capable of perceiving and proving God through his works.

These two objections removed, Saint Thomas proceeds to prove the existence of God by His works.

(From the Theological Sum, that abridgment of Theology written for beginners, as Saint Thomas says.)

Question II.--- Does God exist?

Art. I - Is the existence of God self-evident?

Those who hold that it is, proceed thus:

1. It is self-evident that God exists. For we call self-evident that which we know necessarily and naturally, like first principles. But, as John of Damascus asserts, every mind knows naturally that God exists. Therefore, the existence of God is self-evident.

2. Moreover, all that is instantly certain, so soon as we know the meaning of the terms, is self-evident: such is the evidence which characterizes according to Aristotle the first principles of proof. When you know what the whole is, and what the part is, you at once know, by this very knowledge that the whole is greater than the part. So soon as we know the value of the word God, we at once know that God is. For that name signifies, 'That which has nothing superior to it.' But that which is both real and intelligible is superior to that which is merely intelligible. Hence, God being intelligible, since you possess the idea, it follows that he is also real. Therefore, the existence of God is self-evident. (This is the proof of Saint Anselm.)

Moreover, it is self-evident that truth is; for if you deny that truth is, you grant that it is not. Therefore, there is something true. Therefore, truth is. Now, truth is God Himself. 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life' says the Word. Therefore, it is evident that God is.

On the contrary, we grant that none can conceive the opposite of that which is self-evident, as Aristotle declares in regard the first principles of proof. Now, as a fact, we can think the opposite of the proposition: 'God is', as we see in the Scriptures; 'The fool saith in his heart, There is no God.' Therefore the existence of God is not self-evident.

I reply to all this that a truth is self-evident in two ways: 1. In itself absolutely, and not relatively to us. " 2. In itself and at the same time relatively to us. A proposition is self-evident when the attribute includes itself in the definition of the subject, as follows: (Man is an animate being). For the idea of 'animate being' is included in the definition of 'man'. If therefore, every one knew both the attribute and the subject of a proposition, that proposition would be self-evident to all. This is the case with axioms whose terms are words familiar to all, such as being, non-being, the whole, or the part. But if any one is ignorant of either subject or attribute, the proposition, evident in itself, is not so to him. Thus it happens, says Boethius, that there are truths evident in themselves to sages only, such as: 'That mind is not subject to space'. I say, therefore, that the proposition, 'God is ', taken in itself, is evident, since the attribute and the subject are identical. For God is His very being, as we shall show. But because we don't know what God is, the proposition is not for us di-

rectly evident, but requires to be proved by intermediaries more familiar to us, although in themselves less clear,-- I mean the sensible effects of God's power.

This established, we must reply to the first objection: that we have, it is true, naturally within us, a sort of confused and general knowledge of the existence of God, since, in fact, God is our sovereign Good; since the desire for the sovereign Good is natural, and what we desire naturally, we also know naturally. But this is not exactly knowing the existence of God; as, when I know that some one is coming, I may not therefore know the man who is coming, although I see him coming. And, indeed, all wish for perfect happiness; but some believe that perfect happiness lies in wealth, others in pleasure, and so on.

We reply to the second objection that those who hear the word God, may not understand thereby the Being than whom no higher can be conceived, since there are some who have thought that God was a body. But admitting that all understand by the word 'God' the Being than whom no higher can be conceived, it does not follow that we do admit that such a Being, although He be intelligible (He is this, since we think of Him), therefore existing in the nature of things. And we cannot maintain that he is necessarily real, unless we grant that there is, in the nature of things, a being such that no greater can be conceived. And this is precisely what those who deny God do not grant.

As for the third objection, it is plain, in general, that there is something true; but it is not evident, relatively to us, that there exists a first truth.

Turning now to the proofs themselves, we see at one glance



that the first four, although certainly empirical in the sense that they rest upon an appeal to experienced facts, are in no degree dependent upon induction, and involve no element of probability. The principle of causality, which itself reposes upon that of sufficient reason, is an a priori principle; and upon it as upon a common foundation, these four arguments are built. If valid, they yet yield not probability, but certainty. Thus the first proof takes its departure from the fact that motion--that is, change-- is present in the universe. The amount of change is of no importance. If the reasoning be valid, the argument holds if there be any change at all. Similarly the second argument depends upon the existence of a causal sequence in the universe. The number of actual causes and effects is irrelevant. The existence of one genuine case of causation suffices as well as would an infinite number of such instances.

It is well to notice the close relation between the second Thomistic proof of the existence of God, and the first. In both cases, the necessity of a first cause rests on the impossibility of an infinite regress in an ordered series of causes and effects. Nowhere is one more strongly tempted to admit the thesis that there are not five proofs, but one single proof of the existence of God, divided into five parts. But if by this is meant that the five demonstrations of St. Thomas condition each other---and one critic has gone so far as to assert that the proof from the First Mover is merely the preparation of the proof--this condition is unacceptable. Each proof is self-contained and self-sufficient, and this is eminently true of the proof of the First Mover: *prima et manifestior via*. Yet it is true to say that the five proofs of St. Thomas have the same



structure, and even that they mutually complete each other; for, though each of them is sufficient to establish that God exists, yet each starts from a different order of effects and consequently throws light on a different aspect of divine causality.

Whereas the first proof shows us God as the cause of cosmic movement and of all movements dependent on it, the second presents Him as the cause of the very existence of things. We have found that God is a moving cause; now we know that he is the efficient cause. In a system of knowledge which in respect of the Divine essence subordinates the determination of the quid est to that of the an est, the multiplicity of convergent proofs could not be a matter of indifference.

The third argument, again, demands only the presence of contingency in the universe. The existence of a single contingent being is all that is required.

As regards the fourth argument the situation is somewhat different. This proof depends upon the notion of fine degrees of truth, and of being, a theory which we shall have seen is very important. It appears that in this case no single true proposition, no single existent entity, no single instance of goodness will provide an adequate foundation. The conception of degree introduces also the notions of plurality and comparison. Nevertheless, it is evident that we have not here to do with an argument, which is the outcome of induction in the modern sense of the term. No enumeration of instances is implied by it. The idea which inspired it was that of participation. The possession of such "Perfections"---as St. Thomas styled them---as truth or goodness was conceived by him to involve dependence upon an ultimate source in which these perfections and qualities

existed in their purity, dissociated from all limitation and imperfection. We seem here to be confronted by a particular application of the principle of causality. Clearly, then, we are still in the realm of the a priori.

We turn now to the teleological proof. The objection here advanced is that, even if we admit the validity of the inference from the alleged evidences of design in Nature to an architect of the universe, we are unable to go further. The argument fails us at this point. It yields us no justification for identifying such an architect with the creator of the universe, nor does it enable us to show that this creator possesses absolute power and wisdom. If the teleological be considered in abstraction from all other arguments, Kant's criticism is undoubtedly just. By itself it is inadequate, and can lead us only to a super-human intelligence. But Aquinas did not intend it to be taken by itself, nor, if his other proofs be valid, is there any reason which it should be so taken. Its function is to furnish additional support to the central structure of his argument, or, in other words, to the third proof. Kant's observation that the physico-theological proof is based upon the cosmological is an over-statement. It is based upon the same principle as the cosmological, as, upon that of sufficient reason, but it involves a special application of that principle to a unique set of facts and furnishes an additional confirmation.

From G.K. Chesterton's St. Thomas Aquinas, comes this admission: "Far be it from a poor friar to deny that you have these dazzling diamonds in your head, all designed in the most perfect mathematical shapes and shining with a purely celestial light; all there almost before you begin to think, let alone to

see or hear or feel. But I am not ashamed to say that I find my reason fed by my senses; that I owe a great deal of what I think to what I see and smell and taste and handle; and that so far as my reason is concerned, I feel obliged to treat all this reality, as real. To be brief, in all humility, I do not believe that God meant Man to exercise only that peculiar, uplifted and abstracted sort of intellect which you are so fortunate as to possess; but I believe that there is a middle field of facts which are given by the senses to be the subject matter of the reason; and that in that field the reason has a right to rule, as the representative of God in Man. It is true that all this is lower than the angels; but it is higher than the animals, and all the actual material objects Man finds around him. True, Man also can be an object; and even a deplorable object. But what man has done Man may do; and if an antiquated old heathen called Aristotle can help me to do it, I will thank him in all humility." This has been called and is known as the Appeal to Reason, and the Authority of the Senses.

no definitely argues against a creation of the world. To be sure, this would not necessarily exclude the view that matter is throughout eternity maintained in existence by God, but there is no trace of this in Aristotle.

Aristotle does imply that God's causation is not of either of the two types, physical or mental. However, it cannot be inferred from the fact that Aristotle describes God as exercising infinite power, that he thinks of him as an efficient cause of the former two; his statement that God causes motion as an object of desire or of love is too explicit for that. He is eternal and thus differs from a merely imagined and anticipated ideal. (1)



## DOES A GOD EXIST?

That a God does exist for both Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas has already been proven. There can be no doubt in the reader's mind upon consulting the theories of both philosophers that a supreme being was felt to exist for both the pagan and the Christian. A mere reversion or introspection into their proofs makes this self-evident.

## WHAT MANNER OF GOD IS HE?

Aristotle's God appears to be one of complete sterility. All doing is denied to his God, but one kind of doing is conceded to Him, a reflective contemplation that fills it with beatitude. All action and production is withheld from it; yet it is the ultimate source of all heavenly and earthy movements, by exerting an overwhelming attraction, while itself remains at rest.

Certainly, the God of Aristotle was not the creator of the world, for to him matter is ungenerated, eternal, and he definitely argues against a creation of the world. To be sure, this would not necessarily exclude the view that matter is throughout eternity maintained in existence by God, but there is no trace of this in Aristotle.

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"Because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means of considering how God is, but rather how He is not.....Now, it can be shown how God is not, by denying of Him whatever is opposed to the idea of Him; viz., composition, motion, and the like.----Summa Theologica, Prolegomena to I, q. e.

And so we come to consider in God, His unity, simplicity, immutability, and so forth, all of which tell us rather how God is not affected by the composition and change that belong to creatures, than how He exists in Himself. And therefore we call these attributes of God negative attributes, not as if we were intending thereby to deny to Him any perfection, but because what they tell us of God is His exemption from the composition and change of creatures. They express for us, not what God is, but what He is not.

Unity, meaning undividedness, is a transcendental notion, and must therefore be true of God as it is true of every being by the very fact that the being is undivided. When we say that God is one, our meaning is that the divine nature, unlike a finite nature such as that of man, is not multiplied in many individuals to whom the nature is communicated. God is His own nature, whereas the finite being only shares in the nature which is communicated to it.

The argument for the unity of God to which Aquinas gives preference is the following:

The reason why any singular thing is this particular thing is because it cannot be communicated to many; since that by

which Socrates is a man can be communicated to many, whereas what makes him this particular man is only communicable to one. Therefore, if Socrates were a man by that which makes him to be this particular man, as there cannot be many Socrates, so there could not in that way be many men. Now, this belongs to God alone, for God alone is His own nature.....Therefore in the very same way God is God and He is this God. Impossible is it therefore that many gods should exist.--Summa Theologica, I, q. 11, a. 3.

The absolute simplicity of God is deduced from the infinite actuality of His essence. For infinite act cannot contain any parts, physical or metaphysical. In detail this may be shown:

1. In regard to physical parts: if there were physical parts in the infinite, these parts would have to be:

a) All infinite, and in that case there would be many infinite beings, which is impossible.

b) All finite, and then the infinite would be made up of of the finite; which again cannot be, for every addition of finites must give a finite sum;

c) One infinite and the others finite; but then the infinite would contain all perfection and the finite parts would be useless.

2. In regard to metaphysical parts: If the infinite being contained metaphysical parts, it would have potentiality. But a being having potentiality is capable of more or other perfection, and thus could not originally been infinite.

God is essential activity and essential life. Activity with Him is not transitory or accidental; there is no passing



from inactivity to activity, or from any potentiality to actuality. It is thus that He can be active and living without undergoing any change. His immutability, then, does not mean immobility in our accustomed sense of the word. It means rather His lack of the need to receive determination to any activity or actuality. Such immutability follows from the fact of His infinity. Since in His infinity He already possesses all actuality, there cannot be any possibility of His being determined to the reception of any actuality. He is, therefore, not capable of receiving any new perfection or of losing any perfection already possessed. The same conclusion follows from a consideration of the fact that God is the necessary being. The necessary being must be what it is and therefore cannot change. Again, His simplicity shows Him to be without potentiality, and therefore not capable of an increase or diminution in perfection. On the basis of all of these grounds, it is quite evident that the essence of God must be immutable.

The idea of eternity follows immutability as the idea of time follows movement. . . . Therefore, since God is absolutely immutable, it absolutely belongs to Him to be eternal.

St. Thomas, in warning against Anthropomorphism, gives us the key to the whole difficulty when he warns us that, though an effect must always bear a resemblance to its cause, the cause does not need to be like the effect. Though creatures are like God, and man may even be said to take the image of God, yet God is not like creatures.

The underlying difference between the philosophies of Aristotle and St. Thomas lies in the fact that Aristotle was a pagan and St. Thomas, a Christian. Nevertheless, the offence of St. Thomas consisted in following Aristotle, a pagan, instead of the perfect representative of Christian Tradition, St. Augustine. Had scholasticism been more Augustinian it would have been more religious, and consequently, truer.

What really constitutes a Christian philosophy, in order that it be worthy of the name? First and foremost an exaltation of the power and glory of God. He is Being and Efficiency, in this sense, that all that is exists by Him alone and all that is made is made by Him alone. But what, on the other hand, are Aristotelianism and Thomism? Philosophies of nature, systems, that is to say, which suppose the existence of substantial forms or natures, entities endowed with efficiency, and themselves productive of all the effects commonly attributed to the action of bodies. It can be readily understood of course, that a pagan system like Aristotle's should attribute this subsistence, independence, and efficacy to finite bodies; and if it goes on to attribute our knowledge of bodies to their existence and action on the soul, we need not feel any surprise. But a Christian, surely, should be more happily inspired! Knowing that to cause is to create, and that creative action is proper to God, it was St. Thomas' business to deny the existence of natures or substantial forms, to ascribe all efficiency to God alone, and therefore to situate in God not only the origine of our actions, but the origin of our

actions but the origin of our knowledge as well.

The God of St. Thomas is a God Who loves, the God of Aristotle is a god who does not refuse to be loved; the love that moves the heavens and the stars in Aristotle is the love of the heavens and the stars for god, but the love that moves them in St. Thomas is the love of God for the world; between these two motive causes there is all the difference between an efficient cause on the one hand and a final cause on the other. Even if we were to suppose the god of Aristotle to be a moving and efficient cause, which is not certain, his causality would fall upon a universe which did not owe its existence to him, on beings whose being does not depend on his. In this sense he would merely be the first unmoved mover, but he would not always be the creator of the movement itself.

In a world like Aristotle's all is given, the First Mover, the intermediary movers, the movement, and the beings generated by the movement. Even then if we admit that the First Mover is the first of the motive causes which move by transitive causality, the very being of the movement would still escape his causality. But the case is very different in a Christian philosophy, and that is why St. Thomas, when he would demonstrate creation, needs only to recall the conclusion of his proof of God by movement. It is obvious that if God creates things solely because He moves the causes which produce these things by their movement, God must be a Mover as Creator of movement. In other words, if the proof by the first mover suffices to prove creation, then this proof must of necessity imply the idea of creation. Now the idea of creation is want-



ing in Aristotle, and so the Thomist proof of the existence of God, even if it merely literally reproduces an argumentation of Aristotle's, has a meaning altogether of its own, a meaning that the Greek philosopher never intended giving to it. Also, this same condition is true of the proof from efficient causality. A difference exists between Aristotle and St. Thomas. In both we encounter the same hierarchy of second causes both subordinated to a first cause, but of the lack of passing beyond the plane of efficiency to the plane of being, Greek philosophy fails to emerge from the order of becoming. However, a glance at St. Thomas is enough to show that his proof moves on quite other lines, for with him the proof of the existence of God by efficient causality is the typical proof of creation.

Thus, it can be readily seen that the basic difference between the two philosophers is the idea of revelation and religion in the case of St. Thomas. Christianity has done very much for philosophy as is evidenced in the works of St. Thomas, who undoubtedly presents to man the clearest philosophy ever written. May we thank him for giving to us a pure theology.

A COMPARISON OF THE THEORIES OF ARISTOTLE AND OF ST. THOMAS  
AQUINAS, AS REGARDS THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.Bibliography

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